

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1NEW YORK TIMES
13 November 1986

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Secret Dealings Have Made Use Of Complex Net

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 12 — The secret movement of American military equipment to Iran over the last 18 months was accomplished through an international network of ships, planes, middlemen and companies, according to American and Israeli officials, participants and Iranian dissidents.

The operation, linked to the release of American hostages in Lebanon, involved the use of phony passports, travel under assumed names and flights from Israel and Europe by American and Israeli pilots, according to the sources.

A role has also been played by a Danish ship and Danish seamen, and by mysterious fronts, such as a now defunct Nigerian company based in Brussels.

Three Shipments Are Known

Three shipments of military equipment to Iran have become known: plane deliveries in September 1985, and last July, and a shipload a few weeks ago. The three deliveries, believed to contain millions of dollars worth of military matériel, coincided with the release of American hostages.

While details continue to emerge, several questions remain: Who financed the operation? How many shipments occurred? What were the contents of the shipments? Who chartered the ships and planes?

Although the White House has insisted that the dealings violated no laws, outside legal experts said any final determination required more information. The information available indicates that the network resembles, in some ways, other unofficial Iranian arms deals.

One aspect has been the use of Israeli arms dealers who developed relationships with the Iranian military under the Shah and continued them after the 1979 revolution.

While little has emerged about the contents of the military shipments, it is

possible to reconstruct Iran's priorities from Federal criminal cases involving schemes to sell arms to Iran and from an examination of Iran's military situation in the war with Iraq.

From these sources, it appears that Iran's needs include spare parts for its force of F-4 and F-14 fighters, antitank and antiaircraft missiles, and parts for electronic equipment.

Since September 1985, three American hostages in Lebanon have been released: the Rev. Benjamin Weir on Sept. 14, 1985, the Rev. Lawrence Martin Jenco on July 26, 1986, and David P. Jacobsen on Nov. 2.

The releases coincided with shipments of arms to Iran. In the meantime, additional American hostages have been taken in Lebanon.

The Iranian delegate at the United Nations, Said Rajaie-Khorassani, said today at a news conference that while Iran did obtain American military equipment, the release of the hostages was "purely coincidental."

On Sept. 14, 1985, the day Mr. Weir was released, a DC-8 cargo plane en route from Iran to Spain made an unscheduled stop in Israel. American officials said the plane had delivered military equipment to Iran from Israel as part of the hostage negotiations.

Plane Repossessed by Dealer

Shortly before the mission, the DC-8 had been bought from a Florida dealer by International Air Tours of Nigeria, Ltd., based in Brussels, according to public records. The dealer, Richard R. Wellman, said in a telephone interview that last May he took back the plane, the only one owned by the company, because it defaulted on payments.

Mr. Wellman also said that American and Nigerian authorities had inquired about the plane, but that he had no idea who had chartered the flight.

Last July 3, according to information developed by Iranian dissidents in the United States, a Boeing 707 cargo jet left Rijeka, Yugoslavia, with 23 tons of military equipment labeled as medical supplies. The shipment, intended for the Iranian Air Force, landed in Teheran the next day, according to Ali Safavi of the Moslem Iranian Students Society. Later that month, Father Jenco was released.

Mr. Safavi said documentation obtained from inside Iran indicated that the plane was registered in the United States and that a former Iranian, Far-

had Azima, was involved in the shipment. Records on file with the Federal Aviation Authority show that the plane is owned by Mr. Azima and leased to a company headed by his brother, Farzin Azima.

Farhad Azima, who is based in Kansas City, Mo., is out of the country, according to his secretary. In the past, his planes have been flying in the Middle East, they have flown for the United States Government, and have been used to transport military equipment, according to associates of Mr. Azima.

Recently, members of the Danish Seamen's Union said they had been involved in shipping arms to Iran from Israel. One such shipment in late October, aboard the Danish vessel Morso, came a few days before Mr. Jacobsen was released. The Morso is owned by the Danish shipping company J. Poulsen. Company officials declined to say who had chartered the vessel, citing the sensitivity of the mission.

The various Federal prosecutions related to Iranian arms deals arose because the United States imposed an arms embargo in 1979 after the seizure of the United States Embassy in Teheran.

Among items sought by Iran, prosecutors say, have been TOW antitank missiles, Hawk surface-to-ground missile batteries, F-4 fighter planes, Chaparral missiles, Maverick guided bombs.

Spare parts have also been high on the list, for the F-4, the F-14, and for American-made radar systems.

Navy Sailors Plead Guilty

In San Diego, several Navy sailors have pleaded guilty to selling such items as parts for the F-14 fighter plane and the Phoenix missile.

Earlier this year, Edgardo Pangilinan Agustin and Franklin Pangilinan Agustin pleaded guilty to organizing a ring that stole from Navy bases and illegally shipped to Iran \$7 million worth of F-14 parts from 1981 to 1985.

From December 1984 to July of 1985, investigators intercepted cartons containing parts for the F-14 fighter plane, including one part, the Signal Data Computer, valued at \$450,000 a piece.

In another case, which is coming to trial in New York, 17 people have been charged with conspiring to ship arms to Iran. Lawyers intend to argue that their clients were ensnared in an arms deal approved by the White House. Among those indicted in the case, which involved proposed shipment of nearly \$2 billion in equipment, is Avraham Bar-Am, a retired Israeli general.

The contracts in the deal, which were not carried out, called for shipment, among other things, of five C-130E cargo planes, two Hawk missile batteries, 46 Skyhawk fighter bombers, 200 tires for F-4 fighters, 70 cameras, 18 F-4 fighter planes, 5,000 TOW missiles and 13 F-5 fighters.

A Justice Department official said the case would be reviewed to see whether it was connected to the covert effort to supply military equipment to Iran.

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